

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3, 5-18 and 20-26 are pending. Claims 2, 4 and 19 are canceled. The remaining claims are unchanged.

In the March 4th Office Action, the claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious in view of Agraharam et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,987,508 (“Agraharam”) and Herzog et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,425,003 (“Herzog”).

The Office Action stated that Agraharam “does not explicitly teach about associating a plurality of virtual domain attributes to the virtual domain node, the plurality of virtual domain attributes selected from a designated virtual domain administrator, a designated virtual domain postmaster, a state of the virtual domain and a set of allowed services for the virtual domain.” (Office Action, page 3, lines 3-6). Applicant agrees with this assessment of Agraharam.

The Office Action stated that Herzog teaches a method that uses domain attributes to determine an appropriate service from an active service list (column 1, line 65 through column 2, line 15). Nonetheless, as is the case with Herzog, Agraharam fails to disclose or suggest “associating a plurality of virtual domain attributes to the virtual domain node, the plurality of virtual domain attributes selected from a designated virtual domain administrator, a designated virtual domain postmaster, a state of the virtual domain and a set of allowed services for the virtual domain.”

Claim 1, by way of example, is drawn to a method for defining a virtual domain node in an electronic messaging system, including the features of:

defining a virtual domain node corresponding to a real domain name server in a hierarchically organized directory wherein the hierarchically organized directory is a hierarchical structure that resembles a tree with one major branch at the top and many branches and sub-branches below; and

associating a plurality of virtual domain attributes to the virtual domain node, the plurality of virtual domain attributes selected from a designated virtual domain administrator, a

designated virtual domain postmaster, a state of the virtual domain, and a set of allowed services for the virtual domain.

The method of claim 1 defines a virtual domain node corresponding to a real domain name server in a hierarchically organized directory. By defining a virtual domain node in this manner, for example, a mail server can offer email services to multiple organizations each of which have their own virtual domain. The virtual domain attributes enable each virtual domain node to function as a real domain name server. For instance, a virtual domain administrator can be designated, as recited in claim 1. This administrator can be authorized to manage the particular virtual domain. In addition, a virtual domain postmaster can be designated, as further recited in claim 1. The postmaster can identify email message delivery problems. Also, a state of the virtual domain, as recited in claim 1, can indicate that mail is to be received, or that the virtual domain node is inactive, or no longer exists. Also, virtual domain attributes can include a set of allowed services for the virtual domain, as further recited in claim 1.

Agraharam fails to teach any of the above virtual domain attribute features because Agraharam only teaches an email routing or translation service, not a virtual domain node.

Herzog also describes a routing service rather than a virtual domain node. In particular, Herzog's teachings pertain to routing domain name service (DNS) requests for a user logged into one or more services. Herzog suggests using an active service list (ASL) to keep track of the services and to determine the appropriate service for routing the request. To determine the appropriate service, a QName of the DNS request is compared to a domain attribute for each service. The DNS request is routed to one of the services having an attribute which matches the QName of the request.

While Herzog compares the QName of the DNS request to a "domain attribute," this "attribute" is only the domain name of a service object pointed to by one or more entries in the active service list. For example, in Fig. 4, steps 32 and 34 show a domain name as the attribute to which the QName of the request is compared. Thus, a DNS

request packet having a domain name string of “WWW.CORPA.COM” can be matched to a DNS server associated with CORPA.COM. (col. 4, lines 5-8). To properly route the DNS request packet, in step 32 of Fig. 4, the domain name string “CORPA.COM” is extracted from the DNS request packet and then compared sequentially with the entries in the active service list. (col. 5, lines 4-9).

Even assuming that Herzog’s routing function for forwarding a DNS requests was a form of “virtual domain node,” Herzog’s teachings fall short of “associating a plurality of virtual domain attributes . . . selected from a designated virtual domain administrator, a designated virtual domain postmaster, a state of the virtual domain, and a set of allowed services for the virtual domain.” Instead, Herzog only teaches a single domain attribute in the form of a domain name. Herzog fails to disclose or suggest any structure or function corresponding to a virtual domain node, and associating a plurality of virtual domain attributes to the virtual domain node, as specified in claim 1.

Because Herzog and Agraharam fail to disclose or suggest a virtual domain node and associated virtual domain attributes, the cited references fail to support the obviousness rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. §103, regardless of whether the references are considered alone or in combination. Accordingly, this rejection should be withdrawn.

Dependent claims 3, 5-13, 15, 16 and 17 are dependent upon claim 1 and are, therefore, patentable for at least the same reasons as claim 1.

Independent claims 14, 18 and 26 each incorporate similar features as claim 1 and are, therefore, patentable for similar reasons as claim 1.

The remaining dependent claims, 15-17 and 20-25 are patentable for at least the same reasons as claim the independent claims on which they are based.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above Amendments and Remarks, Applicant submits that the above-identified application is in condition for allowance. Early notification to that effect is respectfully requested.

Should the Examiner believe that a further telephone conference would expedite the prosecution of this application, Applicant's attorney can be reached at the number below.

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John F. Griffith', is written over the printed name.

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